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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN SUDAN: MEETING WITH PRESIDENTIAL
SECURITY ADVISOR ABU JOHN

¶1. (SBU) Summary. On February 28, CG Juba met with GoSS Presidential Security Advisor Samuel Abu John to discuss SPLA reform, military force structure, and CPA implementation modalities. Abu John said that the GOSS realizes the importance of paying the SPLA, but is still trying to get good rolls. He also said that the LRA needed to be stopped as soon as possible, but that current efforts by the Ugandans are inadequate and that the SPLA would most likely have to seriously engage soon. End Summary.

In Search of a Leaner, More Professional Force

¶2. (U) Remembering his meeting with the CG in Yei a year ago, Abu John remarked that things had improved: the GoSS was taking shape, and he personally had overcome the persistent malaria that had wracked him last year. He said that in his new capacity he was responsible for advising on security matters related to the SPLA, and not the police and other security forces that fell under the competency of Minister of Police Daniel Awed.

¶3. (U) The top priority, according to Abu John was to professionalize the SPLA and upgrade its capabilities. He noted that this process was ongoing as the military regrouped many of its forces in Yei and to a lesser degree Nimule. To CG's query on force structure and optimum strength of the SPLA, Abu John replied that this was a work in progress. The plan was to do a complete inventory of forces - total numbers were still not known - and then see which were most physically and mentally fit for retention in the army. The excess would then be considered for other security services: police, national parks, prisons, and the fire brigade. Until this exercise can be completed, Abu John concluded, it will be impossible to provide precise numbers.

CPA Issues

¶4. (SBU) Abu John complained that the North had played an obstructionist role in CPA implementation. Specifically, the GoSS had identified its contribution to the JIUs and made them available for joint training with JIU counterparts from the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), but the Khartoum government had still not identified its forces. Even more seriously, he charged, the GNU had not begun withdrawing northern forces from the south as stipulated in the CPA timetable. CG observed that both sides are bound by these timetables, and that both sides had experienced difficulties in meeting deadlines. CG suggested that the Assessment and Evaluation Commission was a CPA-stipulated mechanism for airing such issues and seeking to broker satisfactory solutions.

Non-payment of SPLA Salaries

15. (SBU) CG observed that the failure to pay SPLA salaries had become a staple of Juba gossip - what was at issue here? Abu John admitted that the root of the problem was the same one underpinning force structure issues - no one had an accurate figure for how many troops were under arms. It was therefore impossible to begin general payment, since every person in the South would attempt to claim he/she had fought with the SPLA. GoSS leadership understood that the soldiers were unhappy and thought that they were being cheated of their due. There was sufficient money to pay several months of salary, and yesterday the first payments had been made in Yei. The SPLA command hoped to assign each soldier a number to help streamline the process in the future. CG noted that logistic and personnel reforms should be part of the professionalization process.

The LRA Problem

16. (SBU) Abu John admitted that the LRA was a problem that was not going away. There had been an attack a few days earlier just 30 miles outside of Juba, and attacks on trucks on the Yei road had made merchants skittish and risked creation of a bottleneck that would reverse the downward trend in Juba market prices that had resulted from opening transportation links to the south. He blamed the North for continuing to provide support to the LRA through aerial resupply -- he said he had reliable witnesses who could corroborate this. He said that he believed UNMIS forces in

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Yambio were aware of this as well, if they would be willing to admit to it.

17. (SBU) He added that there were still many unknowns about the LRA. Despite the numbers tossed about, no one really knew how many fighters were here. He expressed doubt about claims that recruitment had become mostly internal - "Tong Tong" fighters, in the local parlance - because most victims/witnesses of LRA attack said that they communicated in a mixture of Acholi, English and Kiswahili, situating their origin in Uganda. Nonetheless, he realized that they had some local support from guides and others who could be recruited for pay. Abu John said that the LRA appeared to have pulled most of its forces back in an arc running along the borders of Uganda, DRC and CAR. There were reports of LRA forces active in DRC, and he had heard that LRA were present in the Central African town of OBO.

18. (SBU) According to Abu John, the UPDF pursuit of the LRA rebels was laughable. The UPDF rolled down the road in tanks while the LRA remained in the bush. CG asked if the GoSS had settled on a policy of dealing with the problem. Abu John replied that if the GoSS offer of mediation were not accepted, he saw no choice but to go after them with force. If the LRA moved on foot, the SPLA would have to track them on foot. South Sudan could not afford to let the status quo prevail.

Other Issues

19. (SBU) On USG sanctions, Abu John believed the south was being unfairly affected, especially in reopening the railway to Wau. He said that he had heard that the Border demarcation commission had constituted and met in Khartoum a day earlier. He said that he hoped that the commission could come to agreement and stop the North from trying to push the border south, since both petroleum reserves and the

withdrawal of northern forces to their own areas depended upon an accurate border demarcation. CG asked in parting if Abu John felt that his comment last year - " the donors are assessing us to death" - still held true. CG cited some specific USG funded programs for mine removal, health and infrastructure. Abu John acknowledged progress but stressed that much remained to be done, and that expectations in the South were high.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) Abu John understands what need to be done, but realizes that none of the choices will be politically cost-free.

¶11. (U) Full bio data provided septel, March 2005 trip to Yei.

HUME